DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 499 EA 025 711

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TITLE A Study of the Effect of Alternative Programs on the Potential Dropout.
PUB DATE [93]
NOTE 51p.; Master's Thesis, Texas Women's University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Masters Theses (042) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; Early Intervention; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; *Nontraditional Education; *Program Effectiveness; Public Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

Educators are very concerned about the problem of students dropping out of school. The reasons for students dropping out vary from social to economic causes. Alternative programs or schools have been used since the 1960s to try to keep students in school. This study involved a literature review of research on the identification and remediation of at-risk students. It also investigated alternative programs for such students in the Dallas-Forth Worth, Texas, area schools. Research on dropouts has recognized it as a historical problem since compulsory education, but has failed to clearly define the problem. Minority and non-English speaking students have had higher dropout rates. Research has shown that alternative education programs vary in size, structure, and goals. Successful programs separate dropout students from other students, offer vocational training, provide out-of-class learning opportunities, and have a low student-teacher ratio. A review of the Dallas-Fort Worth area found alternative programs at all levels of education serving dropouts and working toward dropout prevention. Students early on showed signs of being at risk and potential dropouts. Appendices A through D include questions, surveys, and results. (Contains 29 references.) (JPT)

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ED 374 499

A Study of the Effect of Alternative Programs on the Potential Dropout

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is dedicated to my family who have encouraged me to finish my Masters and to believe in myself. My wife has stayed up endless hours typing and helping me meet deadlines. My children have given up hours of their time so that I may graduate and to them I thank them very much. I love you!

I would also like to thank Leza Wilson who also has worked very hard and long hours making sure my paper met all university standards. Thank you.

I also have many friends who have made it feasible for this to happen. There are just too many to begin naming, and I may accidentally leave someone out.

I would like to thank my committee for their review of my paper. Thanks to Dr. Stone for being my advisor for many years. He is truly a wonderful, patient man. Thanks to Dr. Short for his wit, his information classes, and friendship. Most of all thanks to Dr. Karr-Kidwell for holding my hand and guiding me step by step these last months, pushing me to complete this paper. Without your phone calls, letters, and messages I would have procrastinated even more. Double thanks!

And finally I must dedicate some of this paper to myself. I've worked hard at two full-time jobs and writing this paper. I don't recommend this strategy to anyone. I needed to prove to myself that I could do it. YES!

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Educators involved in public education are very aware of the large number of students who leave school before graduation. Reasons why students drop out of school vary, but accurate analysis of the reasons is difficult. In the past, economic necessity was a major reason for students dropping out of high school. For several reasons, reliable and valid drop-out data are difficult to obtain. First, operational definitions of the term "dropout" vary radically. Second, data collection methodologies for calculating dropout statistics yield dramatically different results. The third problem with dropout data concerns the way in which these estimates are used (Texas Education Agency, 1989). Today, the reasons vary from low self-esteem, drug abuse, problems within the family unit, pregnancy, behavior problems, correct social interaction skills, and the like. According to Green and Baker (1986), the best and most recent data available for learning about the dropout problem comes from the High School and Beyond study, which was a longitudinal project sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). It consists of a survey of nearly 60,000 students (sophomores and seniors) beginning in 1980. This study has confirmed findings from prior research that identified the following characteristics of students who had dropped out of

school: low socio-economic status, membership in an ethnic or racial minority group, unsatisfactory relationship with family, low self-esteem, enrollment in a nonacademic curriculum, the need to work, and early pregnancy/marriage (Texas Education Agency, 1989).

It is estimated that between fourteen and twenty-five percent of students entering high school nationwide will drop out (Barber, 1987). Before dropping out of school, these students typically manifested behavior associated with being "at risk". These behaviors may be school absentism, many infractions, discipline problems, low grades, and low required testing scores (below the 40th percentile). Thus, an "at risk" student is a potential dropout. Students who drop out often have had attendance problems beginning in elementary school. Schools may have several policies which can contribute to poor attendance. At least 45 percent of all students who drop out have either been suspended or designated as behavior problems by their teachers (Texas Education Agency, 1989).

The word "alternative" has been used widely among our public education system since the 1960s to describe alternative forms of education. Well designed, effective programs are vital for the building of self-esteem and for the academic growth of the "at risk" student. Researchers suggest that many alternative school models can have a positive effect on children whose special needs go beyond that of traditional schooling (Hurley, 1982). These

alternative forms of education are variations of services and offerings available to specific groups of students whose needs are not being met in traditional classes. A variety of programs, classes, and schools that provide services and modified teaching strategies for dropout-prone students still exist (Kennedy, 1988).

Statement of Problem

Every child in the United States today is entitled to an education. Each year, however, thousands of young people drop-out of school. These students are the "forgotten half," the "at-risk" that the school system seems to have overlooked. These students who dropout are from all walks of life, all parts of the country, and of all nationalities (Hurley, 1982). Their lack of appropriate education centers them as unproductive and a drain on the country's resources.

Traditional education is appropriate for a majority of students, but for those who do not respond to the contemporary forms of education they need to be offered alternatives (Hurley, 1982; Texas Education Agency, 1989). Public educators have to try to meet the needs of all children in our schools. Alternative education programs may offer the best hope for meeting the needs of students who are "at-risk."

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this professional paper was two-fold. The

first was to review the literature on various aspects of the identification and remediation of "at-risk" students and to investigate the nature of alternative programs offered for "at-risk" students in the Dallas/Fort Worth area schools in relation to other successful programs reported in the literature. Secondly, the author set up interviews with as many school districts as he could who gave me information on their alternative programs.

Limitations

The primary limitations of this paper were related to selective aspects of the survey. For example, this survey did not reflect the alternative education programs offered in all Texas school districts. Also not all programs work for all students. One program may benefit one person's needs and totally ignore the needs of another.

Definitions

Alternative: Another form of education with variations of services and offerings available to specific groups of students whose needs are not being met in traditional classes.

At-Risk: Those students who are seen as potentially dropping out of school because of various reasons. Reasons vary from low self-esteem, drug abuse, problems within the family unit, pregnancy, behavioral problems, interaction skills, and the like.

Drop-out: A person who has left the educational institution, has not graduated, and is not currently enrolled in regular school anywhere.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The problem of the school dropout is nothing new to education. It has been a problem since the nineteenth century when school attendance became compulsory. During the 1900s, 90 percent of the male population did not graduate. By 1920, the percentage was reduced to 80 percent, but it was not until the 1950s before the dropout rate fell below 50 percent (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Approximately 80 percent of the students who enrolled in school during the 1960s and early 1970s graduated with their class (Kaplan & Luck, 1977).

Today, in major cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, between 35 and 50 percent of the students fail to complete school. Nearly one million students dropped out of school in 1985 including up to 85 percent of all Native American students, 55 percent of the Black American students, and 50 percent of the Hispanic students (Marquand, 1986). Furthermore, one of every four students entering the eighth grade in 1986 will not complete high school and 2.4 million students, up to one-half of the high school population in some major cities, are at risk of dropping out of high school. There is no universally accepted operational definition of "at-risk youth" or what constitutes a "dropout." The dropout problem is

in reality a major educational, social, and economic issue. "Although the national dropout rate is estimated to be at 25 percent, in 1984 New York City the rate is calculated to be 40 percent, in Los Angeles at 55 percent, and in Miami at 50 percent" (Green & Baker, 1986, p. 2). Boyer and Hahn (1987) indicate that "in some city high schools dropouts are estimated to be at 38 percent, in Boston at 43 percent, and in Chicago over 50 percent, of which only a third were reading at the twelfth grade level" (cited in Texas Education Agency, 1989, p. 8). Dropout rates in larger cities have been found to be twice as high as those in the smaller cities namely 25 percent as opposed to 13 percent (Texas Education Agency, 1989).

It is surprising that no standardized research definition of the term "dropout" exists, although educators have expressed concern regarding dropouts for over a century. For example, the United States Census Bureau (1986) defined a dropout as any person who had not graduated and who was not currently enrolled in regular school. The term has come to incorporate a variety of early school leavers. In the absence of standardized criteria for defining the "dropout," the term may become manipulatory and subjective depending on one's purpose or goal (Morrow, 1986).

Disparities in definitions have continued to occur between individual cities and states. For example, New York defined

dropouts to be any ninth through twelfth grader who was no longer enrolled in school, including special education. Los Angeles referred to only senior high school in grades ten through twelve and did not use the term "dropout," but rather refered to "early school leavers." Boston classified a "dropout" as any student over sixteen who left school regardless of grade (Hammack, 1986). A "dropout" was also defined as a student who withdrew from school without a high school diploma and without enrolling elsewhere; however, schools and communities still had difficulty agreeing on a uniform definition of what youth dropouts were and when a former student was officially recognized as one (Orr, 1987). The Texas Education Agency in 1989 stated, that in order to assure effective communication between practitioners it was necessary to establish a precise understanding of terms. In defining a given word, it is presupposed that valid and reliable interpretations of the term exist. However, when attempting to operationalize words associated with the "at-risk" literature, there exists a general level of "fuzziness" which shrouds even the most commonly used terms. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that practitioners and researchers alike often coin new phrases to describe particular situations (Texas Education Agency, 1989).

Who Drops Out

The highest dropout rates are found in areas where there is a

large minority population and fewer English-speaking students. Research shows that the dropout rate for Native Americans living in urban settings may be as high as 85 percent, while the Puerto Rican dropout rate varies between 70 and 80 percent. The Black American dropout surpasses the white dropout rate by 40 percent, with the Hispanic dropout rate 50 percent higher than the white dropout rate. The southeastern and western states have the highest dropout rates in comparison to the midwestern states (Education U.S.A., 1986). In 1989, the Texas Education Agency stated that dropouts for Native American, Hispanic, and Black youth ranged from 36-85 percent (Rhodes, 1987). The United States General Accounting Office reported that of the 4.3 million dropouts in 1985, 3.5 million were White, 700,000 were Black, and 100,000 were from other groups (Hahn, 1987). Boyer (1987) in experimenting dropout rates for Hispanic and Puerto Rican students, found that "almost 50 percent drop out before graduation. Characteristics identifying those students at risk of dropping out need to be clearly understood, and systematic attempts need to be undertaken to monitor youth who exhibit these characteristics" (p. 4).

Reasons for Dropping Out

In 1985, research showed that students left school for a variety of reasons. The most common reason given was the students

"dislike of school." The other reasons which could be seen as educational, economic, or family-related included: (a) learning difficulties-low grades; (b) pregnancy-marriage; (c) economic need-finding a job; (d) history of failure in school; (e) pushed out-raised standards could not be met; (f) burned out-trying too hard to succeed; (g) poor relationships with teachers and peers; (h) poor home support for education; and (i) lack of supportive environment (Digest of Education Statistics, 1985).

Beck and Muia (1980) and California's Open Road Research Project (Education U.S.A., 1986) suggested there were other "unalterable circumstances" such as language, culture, and race which also contributed to the dropout problem. These differences placed the students from low socio-economic groups at a disadvantage when the student was not able to conform to the middle class standards associated with the educational system.

Components of Alternative Education

To depart from tradition and help satisfy differing educational appetites, the term "alternative education" joined in the educational jargon of the 1980s (Rudolph, 1984). Alternative schools come in different shapes and sizes and vary in objectives and philosophies from school district to school district. All involve a total educational program and occur at any educational level. Most alternative schools are small, but there are no size

limitations. The most basic consideration of any alternative school is that students and parents have a choice in selecting an educational program (Johnson & Slotnik, 1985; Murane, 1984; Raywid, 1984; Texas Educational Agency, 1989; Watson, 1972). Alternative schools are not always effective unless the students they serve are highly motivated. In magnet schools, or schools that parents are allowed to choose based on their children's needs, interest, and abilities, attendance is higher and dropout rates are lower than district averages (Texas Education Agency, 1989).

Kaplan and Luck (1977) reviewed a variety of national dropout prevention programs which were initiated in the 1950s through the 1970s. The major goal of these prevention programs was to reduce the number of students leaving school by improving attendance and academics - the major factors which were known to attribute to the dropout phenomenon.

Most school systems today have instituted some form of alternative dropout prevention programs with varying degrees of success. The majority of successful programs incorporate four components: (a) they separate potential dropouts from the other students; (b) they have a vocational education component; (c) they offer out-of-classroom learning opportunities with the possibility of paid employment; and (d) they maintain low student-teacher

ratios and have strong and active counseling components (Hamilton, 1986). Hodgkinson (1985) concurred with Hamilton's findings and added: (a) personal attention is addressed to students needs; (b) emphasis is placed on the "immediate and practical"; (c) rewards are given for student achievement; (d) emphasis is on basic skill instruction; and (e) follow-up is maintained after a student leaves school. Many school systems have begun focusing on recruiting dropouts back to school and developing programs to meet their needs. These systems are responding to the many social and economic consequences for both the dropout and society.

Project 7001 is one successful program established to meet the needs of dropouts. The program offers job training and work placement, counseling, alternative education and peer support. It is funded by the Department of Labor and operates in cities, serving the needs of dropouts between the ages of 16 and 21. The goal of Project 7001 is to provide dropouts with skills which will enable them to meet entry level employment requirements (Beck & Muia, 1980). A project similar to 7001 is called Partners for Success. This project addresses the problem of "at-risk" high school students with limited English proficiency. The project director and resource teacher are fully in charge and guide students on a work/study arrangement that placed them in part-time jobs, tutoring classes, classes on study skills and decision

making; school clubs and social events; a program of visits to colleges, and industries in the area (Cross, 1991).

Early Identification

In a majority of cases, dropping out of school results from lack of interest and from academic failure which developed from negative attitudes. Both do not develop spontaneously but grow over a period of time from conditions and education practices. One consistent finding in dropout research was that alternative actions and intervention strategies were best designed as preventative measures (Beck & Muia, 1980).

If high-risk factors are evident in an elementary school population, then school personnel will best serve the potential dropout by employing sound educational practices which emphasize the teaching of basic skills. Positive student attitudes toward school can be developed through presenting a humanistic approach to learning and discipline. Also vital in the elementary school is extensive home-school communication to insure that parents develop positive attitudes toward education and become appropriate models for their children (Kaplan & Luck, 1977). In Jonesborough, Tennessee a program called LIFE promotes family involvement in education to increase student achievement. Students in grades K-8 are being helped to develop a positive attitude towards education,

and parents are encouraged to establish high educational expectations for their children and to pass these along through home-learning activities and research-based techniques in parenting and behavior management (Cross, 1991).

Junior high school is a critical period for the identification of the potential school dropout because previously established negative attitudes begin to be reflected in overt, negative behaviors which are easily recognizable. During adolescence, alternative actions must address the social and emotional needs of this age group. Positive peer pressure, group counseling and "approachable" staff are ingredients for successful intervention (Beck & Muia, 1980). West Fresno School District in Fresno, California has a project called MIRROR that reaches out to these children with early intervention. Community role models work with families and students. Successful individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds share their own experiences with the disadvantaged students to create a "mirror effect." Other activities featured by this project are teacher and family training, family school retreat, strategic planning sessions, and tutorial components (Cross, 1991).

High school students who are identified as potential dropouts generally have reached the age of decision, sixteen; therefore, intervention programs should concentrate on keeping the students

in school until they have reached their maximum educational potential and/or have acquired the skills necessary to become productive members of society. Alternative schools are an approach which has been shown to be successful in accomplishing this task. They address not only academics but also those social and behavioral characteristics which influence a student's performance (Texas Education Agency, 1989; Theodore & Law, 1987).

Examples of Successful Programs

School systems in 1977 had success with alternative education programs utilizing components previously mentioned. The major goal of these programs is to improve attendance and academics therefore reducing the number of students leaving school. Attendance and academics are factors which are known to attribute to the dropout phenomenon (Kaplan & Luck, 1977).

Students who drop out may have bad attendance problems beginning in elementary school. Therefore, policies to monitor and improve attendance are central to many urban school dropout prevention plans. A growing number of people, organizations, and institutions are developing joint strategies to hold students in school until they graduate. Many of their efforts greatly enhance the chance for at-risk students to stay in school (Texas Education Agency, 1989).

To accomplish the goal of improved attendance and academics, the aforementioned prevention programs added the following educational components. They increased attendance personnel, increased parent contact, incorporated remedial and vocational components into the curriculum, improved communication with the community, provided guidance and counseling services, and established re-entry programs for those students who had already withdrawn (Kaplan & Luck, 1977).

In Jacksonville, Florida, the Duval County Public Schools have established another program to encourage dropouts to return to school. Vocational specialists use comprehensive methods to identify dropouts and then offer them a vocational program. Dropouts learn the skills needed for an entry-level position and are awarded a vocational certificate rather than a diploma. Upon completion of the training program, the student may enter the school's industrial/cooperative education program and be placed in a work experience situation. When one considers the enormous loss of revenue to state and federal governments for each dropout, the efforts taken to help dropouts re-establish themselves in an educational and/or vocational program seem extremely cost effective (Education U.S.A., 1986).

At the James B. Conant High School in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, a new program, Achievement Motivation, was initiated for the unmotivated and chronically disruptive students. According

to Grossnickle (1985) interrupting the failure cycle and replacing it with successful patterns of thinking was the approach that was taken. Peer group counseling seminars with six students per group were held for one period every other day for a semester. The group leader, a teacher, did not ask for the school history of the students, but was interested only in what happened during the sessions. Students were encouraged to interact and talk. Scenarios were staged and the students reacted to them. An important facet was to get students thinking about how they viewed themselves and what others thought about them. Friendships were also explored. The study showed that there were significant changes in lifestyles and goals among the students in the program.

Crisci (1986) discussed the Quest National Center formed a decade ago, to equip youngsters between the ages of 10 to 18 with skills for successful living and learning. The semester-long curriculum of the center dealt with specific concerns of adolescents as a theme for a unit. These concerns were self-concept feelings, attitude, friends, peer pressure, decision making, careers, and drug abuse. Many of these discussions took place in small counseling groups with input from the students. In 1986, the program reached approximately 800,000 young people in 47 states and 7 foreign countries. Through this program, young people have gained a sense of positive connection to their schools

and communities and a strong antidote to feelings of alienation, despair, and loss of purpose. Trust and mutual respect are essential for learning to take place. It is important that teachers believe "at risk" students deserve a renewed opportunity to learn. High expectations from others are decisive in developing student self-esteem and motivation (Texas Education Agency, 1989).

Levine, Levine, and Eubanks (1984) noted that with targeted high risk students, the New York City Community District #12 had focused on the higher-order skills. Group counseling that was provided every other week frequently focused on such topics as: orientation for sixth graders, career counseling, selecting a high school, problems of non-promoted students, and specialty groups for overnight students, and students with low self-esteem. In addition to group counseling, the after-school detention program included a tutoring program. Meanwhile, a school/home liaison worker helped coordinate services for students with physical, social, or emotional problems.

Watrous (1984) reported about such a school, the John Ericsson Junior High in Brooklyn, New York, where students were placed in high, medium, and low achievement groupings in English, mathematics, social studies and science according to their combined scores on achievement tests in reading and mathematics.

All classes were then scheduled at the same time for a given subject and grouping. Within each ability level students were assigned heterogeneously. These classes generally included a wide range of abilities. This arrangement made it possible to reassign students from class within their ability level without introducing wide extremes in achievement. This system appeared to be successful in its retentive power.

Edmonds (1979) reported on the Cleveland Middle School in Detroit, where the school was organized into three main strata or programs to help the ever-rising drop out problem. The Excellence Program was for high achieving students who were placed in relatively small classes with a diverse curriculum of academic courses. The large majority of students were in Cleveland's regular program and a relatively small number were in the Success Program for very low achievers.

Throughout most of the school, the emphasis was on developing higher-order skills. To accomplish this, Cleveland Middle School's teachers stressed holistic teaching, in which instruction centered on the development and application of functional language and thinking skills. For example, they systematically planned and implemented such language-oriented activities as public speaking, academic olympics, poetry reading, and dramatization (Edmonds, 1979).

Another approach used successfully at the Cleveland Middle School was to have the principal and faculty reward students for successful behavior in all areas of the school's operation. They believed that such rewards not only helped develop a more positive self-esteem on the part of the reward system but also all students carried a form to record the points they received for good performance in academics, athletics, and other activities. Many students seemed to be highly motivated by this daily record of their contributions and accomplishments. Students were rewarded in a variety of ways from trips, trophies, and banners to splash parties for classrooms, in which students as a group accumulated a high number of points. Since the implementation of this program, the inner-city adolescents have been consistently more successful in school, therefore, lessening the potential dropout problem (Edmonds, 1979).

Jacques (1982) reported on the Metropolitan Youth Center, a Colorado solution to the problem of high school dropouts. The first objective of the Center was to try to return each student to the mainstream of education. The philosophy of this program was to deny students the right to fail by giving them unlimited chances to succeed. Besides the basic curriculum of English, social studies, mathematics, and reading, the Center offered a diversified art program which was structured to let students

explore the field and develop marketable talents. Vocational training was available in auto-mechanics, business skills, drafting, welding, and electronics. In addition, the Center followed many students into the world of work, through a cooperative work-experience program. There were no semesters and no grade-level identification. Each student's schedule was built around his or her available time, depending on such factors as child care and working hours.

A study on Copen and Lebwhol (1984) of the Walkabout program in Yorktown Heights, New York, revealed a program designed to assist high risk adolescents in their transition to adulthood. The philosophy of this program was to accelerate individual effectiveness and included: (a) confidence--trust in oneself, self-esteem, (b) attitude--positive attitude turned failure into an opportunity to learn and grow, whereas negative attitude became self-fulfilling prophecy and stifled the willingness to try new things, (c) responsibility--choice plus accountability and (d) skills--the ability to do a job.

Parents, teachers and community resource people helped students draw up a contract that spelled out the goals, objectives, and requirements of his or her Walkabout experience. Each contract included basic skills or competencies to be developed, a project that used these skills, and community

service. Students received academic credit, not pay, for their experiences. The staff member who coordinated the Walkabout helped students plan their experiences and served as liaison between the school, the student, and the community (Copen & Lebwhol, 1984). A big majority of students who dropout of school do so because school seems irrelevant or because they can't get along with their teachers.

Corpus Christi Independent School District in Corpus Christi, Texas, offers Project Intervention for its at-risk students. The program's objectives include improving school attendance, decreasing disruptive behavior in the classroom and community, improving achievement in mathematics, English, and reading; developing vocational skills, and increasing parental involvement (Banks, 1987).

A big part of the program involves peer tutoring. Students who are referred, mostly by teachers and honors groups, earn minimum wage for tutoring students identified as likely dropouts. In addition to these programs, Project Intervention makes full use of the many available non-school resources. These resources are: (a) public agencies, (b) private foundations, (c) non-profit youth organizations, and (d) businesses. The success of Project Intervention also includes counseling services provided by the Corpus Christi Independent School District and parental involvement (Banks, 1987). There are several characteristics that

are common to programs that have been found to be successful in working with at-risk students and dropouts.

The Adolescent Primary Health Care Clinic in Houston, Texas provides an alternative program to education. The program components are: (a) free year-round health clinic, (b) comprehensive remediation and job preparation services for teen mothers, and (c) dropout prevention program for pre-adolescent boys. Targets of this program include students at nine middle and high schools, teen mothers, and high-risk pre-adolescent boys (Garrison, 1987).

The clinic, which provides services to students in one of Houston's poorest areas, has offered dropout prevention and service programs that build upon the clinic's medical care and counseling. Established in 1981, the clinic is sponsored by the Urban Affairs Corporation, a private, nonprofit human service agency. The clinic provides free health care to eligible students and their children. In 1984-85, the clinic served 1,100 students, 14 percent of its target population (Garrison, 1987).

Housed with the clinic in a converted junior high school is a program serving over 200 pregnant and parenting teenage girls, called Training and Employment for Adolescent Mothers (TEAM) II. TEAM II provides day care, medical services, pre-employment and vocational training, and placement and educational services to

eligible young women aged 14-22. TEAM II explicitly targets the dual problem of teen pregnancy and dropping out of school. About 80 percent of participants are dropouts; the program encourages them to return to school and complete their education (Garrison, 1987).

In addition to the program to aid young mothers, the clinic has initiated the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, which targets 30 pre-adolescent boys at risk of dropping out of school. Through early intervention, the program aims to instill a sense of the importance of education, helps the boys with personal problems, and eases their transition into junior high school. In seventh grade, the boys are entered in remedial classes during school and participate in academic, therapeutic, and enrichment activities after school. Through intensive counseling and reinforcement of good behavior, the program encourages them to stay in school and succeed (Garrison, 1987).

Both TEAM II and the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program draw on the medical care, social services, and counseling and referral resources of the clinic in providing comprehensive care to their target groups. The two programs are separately funded through a mixture of foundation and Texas Department of Human Services funds, with space and resources contributed by the Houston Independent School District. The program's preliminary results

show marked improvement in students' attendance, grades, and classroom behavior (Garrison, 1987). There is no clear evidence that vocational approaches are directly effective in reducing dropout rates. There is evidence that the more successful vocational programs result in a decrease in suspensions and increased academic achievement (Garrison).

The Secondary Credit Exchange Program in the state of Washington offers educational opportunities for migrant students. Components of this program include the following: (a) accessible, comprehensive instructional program for working students, (b) interstate student record transfer system, (c) cooperative relationship among school districts, (d) evening school program covering 4-5 courses, and (e) focus on basic skills (Garrison).

Migrant young people often go to school in the winter when little work is available. In the spring, those thirteen and older usually stay out of school to work in the fields. Without a means of coordinating their education program across districts and states, few migrant students would ever be able to complete high school. The program of Washington State offers working migrant youth evening secondary school classes and transfers the credits they earn back to their home schools in Texas, California, and elsewhere in Washington (Garrison).

The migrant youth program approach illustrates how local school districts can adjust their structure to the employment needs of those they are to educate and how states and their districts can cooperate in managing a joint education program. This is essentially an evening junior and senior high program that provides as much educational continuity as possible across school districts for 50-750 migrant students. Home schools design the curriculum and course of study for each student, which receiving-schools try to match and complete. The sending-schools recruit students in the winter, before they move north. Students' course information is transmitted on an automated data system, designed for all migrant children and youth nationwide, to Washington state (Garrison).

After the working day, students in grades 7 through 12 are transported from the camps to a local high school for instruction in four or five academic subjects. The instructional emphasis is on basic skills. At the end of the program, successfully completed credit hours are transferred back to the students' home schools or course credit. The Secondary Credit Exchange Program is under the direction of the migrant education staff of Washington State's Education Department. The school districts volunteer to offer the program, supporting it with local, basic education funds and supplements by federal compensatory education monies.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this professional paper was two-fold. The first purpose was to review the literature on various aspects of the identification and remediation of "at-risk" students and to investigate with a survey the nature of alternative programs offered for "at-risk" students in the Dallas and Fort Worth area schools in relation to other successful programs reported in the literature. Secondly, interviews were conducted with as many personnel in the Dallas-Fort Worth area who were available to provide more extensive information on their alternative programs.

Texas Woman's University Human Subjects form and approval was granted for this survey (see Appendix A). The survey instrument used to gather information for this study was designed by the author (see Appendix B). This survey instrument indicated that the overall dropout rate in the Dallas-Fort Worth area was approximately 20%. The overall ethnic breakdown of the dropouts indicated approximated 45% Black American, 45% Hispanic, and 10% White or other. After considering all of the responses, it was concluded that the same programs, under different titles, were offered by the school districts surveyed. For example, Fort Worth Independent School District (ISD) Metro; Hurst-Euless-Bedford, Keeping Eligible Youth in School (KEYS); Arlington's Venture

program; and Irving's Mega program are all based on the same philosophy to allow students to finish school and to graduate. However, term "alternative education" was one area that was represented in many ways. Alternative education was used in most smaller districts for discipline procedures as a last chance for students before expulsion. The larger school districts such as Fort Worth ISD, Dallas ISD, and Arlington ISD were geared towards dropout prevention, offering a number of "alternative programs." The school districts in this study were using a term dropout prevention entitled "at-risk" stay-in-school programs.

Several "at-risk" programs were offered in the fifteen out of twenty Dallas and Fort Worth area school districts. "Stay-in-School" programs related to increasing the high school graduation rates were used in most urban districts. They increased students' opportunities to achieve by decreasing the academic, cultural, and social obstacles that detracted from achievement. Successful completion of basic skills, which is the foundation of employable traits, were encouraged for students in these districts.

The keynote of the identification component was early detection. Plans were specific indicators such as repeating previous grades, standardized test scores, cumulative folders, possible psychological tests, grade reports, peer concerns, parent

concerns, and previous discipline infractions or violations within the districts which could prove beneficial to teachers and other staff members in identifying "at-risk" students. There were other examples of area early detection, intervention, and prevention programs for "at-risk" students. At the elementary level, there was Project Charlie. This program existed in many school districts, especially Dallas and Fort Worth ISD. This program was originated by the Junior League in conjunction with the Tarrant Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse unit. It was taught by trained volunteers and taught in grades three and five. McGruff was also an elementary program taught in Fort Worth and Arlington in grades K-2. It used puppets and tapes that dealt with all types of personal safety. Still another intervention program geared to elementary children was the Beginning Alcohol and Addiction Basic Education Series (BABES). BABES was founded in the Grapevine-Colleyville and Fort Worth ISD's and was a primary prevention program directed towards children to instill living skills, to avoid substance abuse, and to adopt healthy responsible values and attitudes. BABES program was offered through the Charter Hospitals in Grapevine, Dallas, and Fort Worth. The Sunshine Club was yet another elementary program geared for young children. This program was usually a one-week program that took elementary students with counselors and community agencies to do

group therapy. Usually children who participated in this program were ones whose parents were alcohol or drug abusers. Another elementary program was Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE). DARE was sponsored throughout the metroplex. Some school districts were Fort Worth, Dallas, Arlington, Keller, Birdville, Hurst-Euless-Bedford, Grapevine-Colleyville, and Irving. This program was a cooperative effort between local police departments and the school districts. It was used to teach special skills, such as helping students to stand up to the temptations of alcohol and drugs. DARE was mostly for fifth graders, sometimes sixth.

Middle schools or Junior High schools also had programs that were focused towards intervention of the "at-risk" child. One such program was peer tutoring. Peer-tutoring was found in most of the metroplex schools. Tutoring took place in all grade levels where students who had mastered the subject would teach another student who had not. This would build not only academic success, but also self-esteem, and positive interaction skills. Vital-Link was a program pioneered in Fort Worth and has gained national recognition because of its great review. Vital-Link was offered to sixth graders during the summer months, although some schools were working Vital-Link during the regular school year. This program was in cooperation with community businesses. It gave students the opportunity for hands-on and on-the-job-training, built

self-esteem, and gave students an understanding of how academics played a major role to real life situations.

The remaining programs were targeted towards the high school student. First, there were Vocational Occupational schools. These programs were set up for the less motivated student with regard to academics, and to meet the student's needs in related job market skills such as on-the-job-training. The majority, if not all school districts, offered some sort of vocational training. Examples of some programs were Industrial Arts, typing, auto mechanics, home-making, wood work, and some half day school/work programs. School Age Parent Programs, to some extent, were offered in most districts, but Fort Worth ISD did cater to one school in particular for expectant girls. This school, New Lives, provided curricula to meet individual's needs and allowed for interaction between mothers-to-be who had different problems. The program also utilized peer guidance. Night schools were offered by both Dallas and Fort Worth ISD's and were connected with high school courses offering to meet graduation requirements or equivalency test requirements. Classes were held at some of the high schools at night to meet the needs of working students.

Adopt-A-School programs were found in the larger school districts such as Dallas, Arlington, Fort Worth, and Hurst-Euless-Bedford. They were mentoring programs where the

business community was involved with the educational process. Business professionals tutored and counseled students and involved themselves with the needs of the students at that particular school. Another program, counseling activities, included peer counseling among students at all grade levels to aid in early detection and prevention of "at-risk" students. Most metroplex schools had this program, but there were variations from district to district, depending on their guidelines and resources. They would have group therapy, and at times used outside resources for assistance. Other programs have utilized parents as an external resources.

Family Home-School-Parents were a program offered in all school districts. It seemed to be an idea of the 1990s, but one that had been in existance for a long time. Home-School-Parents taught their children at home with state curriculum and state supervision. This program was for parents either who did not approve of traditional school or for students who were ill and at home for an extended period of time.

There were also programs that allowed students to walk across the stage and graduate. Keeping Eligible Youth in School (KEYS) located in the Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD was a program geared for the "at-risk" student who was in danger of dropping out of school or had already dropped out and was returning to school. The KEYS

school met the individual academic needs of the student. Students worked at their pace on required course work. The program allowed flexibility for the working student. Students were expected to accept their own responsibilities for attendance knowing that any absence was added on to the end of the course work. There was no absence allowed.

The Birdville ISD also offered an alternative to the traditional learning environment in their Shannon Learning Center. Absenteeism was the number one problem shared by students at the center. This program was similar to KEYS in that it allowed no absences. All absences had to be made up, regardless of the reason. Students attended three and one-half hours daily working at their own pace on individualized curricula. Students chose morning or afternoon classes according to their schedules. It was a regular school, but very relaxed and informal. How quickly students got through the program depended on self-motivation, determination, and success.

Two other programs in the metroplex, the Venture Education Program in the Arlington ISD and the Mega program in Irving ISD were based on the same philosophy and patterned after KEYS. Venture and Mega were also accountable for the state's essential elements with the same requirements as regular education.

The information for the programs, gathered from the

questionnaire "Identifying Approaches in Your School District" was also used for tabulations (Appendix C). A chart was also constructed to show the results from the Dallas and Fort Worth area school districts (Appendix D).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Students of every ethnic group regardless of race, color, creed, or any handicapping condition are ordered to receive an education. Cultural, environmental, and social differences among these children can create a situation that can hinder rather than encourage academic growth. Each child or adolescent has an unique educational need, and do not learn the same.

The responsibility to improve the dropout rate must begin with a concentrated effort by educators, community leaders, and parents. Past and present research data on dropout rates indicate that efforts to reduce the dropout dilemma have resulted in minimal progress. The social and economic impact that dropouts have on society is too great to be ignored. It is essential that a standardized definition of the term "dropout" be established so that efforts are consistent and data can be shared, with net-working conferences, community groups, and computer technology. The dropout problem is no longer solely the responsibility of educators.

Prevention must be included in any intervention program to keep students in school. Educators have long reacted to the immediate problems resulting from the negative attitudinal and behavioral symptoms of the potential dropout. Without the preventive components, the dropout rates could continue to increase

as more students face discouragement and failure in school.

After analyzing the information received from the personnel in the Dallas-Fort Worth school districts, there was a consensus that they identified an "at-risk" student during the sixth and seventh grades. The following common indicators were used by all of the districts: (1) repeating the previous grades; (2) standardized test scores; (3) cumulative folders; (4) possible psychological tests; (5) grade reports; (6) peer concerns; (7) parent concerns; and (8) previous discipline infractions or violations. House Bill 1010 was also a factor in that year; 1989-1990 states that students must be identified as "at-risk" students earlier. These students should be identified in the elementary school according to this bill.

More educators, parents, and citizens have become aware and informed about the options to traditional schools. Many factors such as demographics, social, and economics have become a part of students' behavior and attitudes in classrooms. Thus, an issue of the nineties is that all citizens should be made aware of and encouraged to support the need to reach all children, no matter what their academic, social, or emotional handicap.

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APPENDIX A

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
DENTON DALLAS HOUSTON
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND GRANTS ADMINISTRATION
P.O. Box 22939, Denton, Texas 76204 817/898-3375

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE

September 24, 1993

Cyril Gloria
4013 Hemlock Street
Ft. Worth, TX 76137-2016

Social Security #: 465-82-2555

Dear Cyril Gloria:

Your study entitled "A Study of the Effect of Alternative Programs on the Potential Dropout" has been reviewed by a committee of the Human Subjects Review Committee and appears to meet our requirements in regard to protection of individuals' rights.

Be reminded that both the University and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations typically require that signatures indicating informed consent be obtained from all human subjects in your study. These are to be filed with the Human Subjects Review Committee. Any exception to this requirement is noted below. Furthermore, according to HHS regulations, another review by the Committee is required if your project changes.

Special provisions pertaining to your study are noted below:

_X_ The filing of signatures of subjects with the Human Subjects Review Committee is not required.

_X_ Your study is exempt from further TWU Human Subjects Review.

___ No special provisions apply.

Sincerely,

Patti Thomas

Chairman
Human Subjects Review Committee

cc: Graduate School
Dr. Howard Stone, Educational Leadership

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APPENDIX B

Alternative Education Programs

1. What is the approximate dropout rate in your district?

2. What is the ethnic breakdown of dropouts in your district?

3. At what grade level are students identified as being "at-risk"?

4. In your district what issues are identified by "at-risk" students as their personal needs in education?

5. What are the different types of alternative education programs available in your school district?

6. Which programs are for students with discipline problems?

7. Does you district implement alternative programs at the elementary and middle school level? If so, please describe.

8. Please include any additional information you feel will be helpful in this study of alternative education.

APPENDIX C

Identifying Approaches in Your School District

That Help Students Stay in School

The following is a list of approaches that various school districts are using to address the problem of students leaving school before graduating. Please check any that you feel are current activities or efforts in your school district designed to help students stay in school.

___remedial classes

___tutoring programs (including peer tutoring)

___evening and/or weekend classes

___motivational development activities

___parent involvement

___vocational/occupational education activities and classes

___school-age parents programs

___career education activities

___on-the-job training

___experiential learning activities

___self-awareness classes

___home-school counselor/coordinator

___goal attainment (short-term attainable goals)

___health screening

___basic skills classes

___counseling activities (including peer counseling)

___reading programs

___advisement activities

___parenting classes

___alternative education programs or schools

___special education programs

___work experience activities

___work study programs

___adopt-a-student activities

___decision-making activities

___parent education

___alcohol and other drug use/abuse programs

___truancy committee

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

APPENDIX D

IDENTIFYING APPROACHES IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

THAT HELP STUDENTS STAY IN SCHOOL

APPROACHES	DISTRICTS														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
remedial classes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
tutoring programs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
evening and/or weekend classes	X	X													
motivational development act.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
parent involvement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
vocational/occupational ed.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
school-age parent program	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X			
career education activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
on-the-job training	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
experimental learning activity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
self-awareness classes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
home-school counselor coord.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
goal attainment (short-term)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
health screening	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
basic skills classes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
counseling activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
reading programs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
advisement activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
parenting classes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X			
alternative education schools	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
special education programs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
work experience activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
work study programs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
adopt-a-student activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
decision-making activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
parent education	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X			
substance abuse programs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
truancy committee	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

URBAN DISTRICTS

1. Fort Worth ISD
2. Dallas ISD
3. Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD
4. Arlington ISD
5. Irving ISD
6. Birdville ISD
7. Denton ISD
8. Grand Prairie ISD
9. Grapevine-Colleyville ISD
10. Keller ISD

RURAL DISTRICTS

11. Mansfield ISD
12. Brewer ISD
13. Castleberry ISD
14. Lake Worth ISD
15. Everman ISD